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Mid-Season Report of the Archaeological Survey of the State of Tamaulipas, Mexico

February 26, 1946.

The archaeological survey of coastal Tamaulipas, sponsored by the University of Chicago, is now half completed. The area surveyed extends from the Soto la Marina River to the north bank of the San Fernando River, as well as Cameron County, Texas. The purpose of this expedition is to ascertain the types and periods of prehistoric Mexican cultural influences that may have extended northward along this coast, and the bearing this influence may have had upon the relationships between Mexico and southeastern part of the United States.

Fifty-seven sites have been found. These sites may be immediately classified into the three following groups: cultures of the Sierra de Tamaulipas, Tancol camp sites, and non-pottery camps.

Fifty-two of the sites found are of the non-pottery camp type. All of these sites, with one exception (a very large site), are small and are situated along arroyos or rivers (not on the coast). They contain flint chips, projectile points, quantities of shell, but little or no pottery. The cultural refuse deposits are usually less than two feet deep. The pottery gives no indication of age and for the most part, bears little resemblance to any known pottery. A few pieces

are slightly suggestive of early mission ceramics from Texas, while others, a red ware, bear resemblance to sherds in the Tamaulipas Mountains. According to Dr. J. Charles Kelley of the University of Texas, the projectile points are, for the most part, similar to the late phase of the Central Texas cultures.

One site on an island near La Pesca at the mouth of the Rio Soto La Marina, two sites at the mouth of the Arroyo Cocheras, and one site at the mouth of the Rio San Fernando, I am tentatively calling Tancol camp sites. The first of these sites was examined the most thoroughly, and a fifteen foot by five foot test trench was put into it. The following comments will be based mainly upon this site, althoughthey probably are true of the three other sites as well. I hope to examine the others more thoroughly in the future. The site under discussion is a small island, the top three feet composed mainly of shell. The shell is refuse matter, as sherds, charcoal and flint are found intermingled with it at all levels. A tentative identification of some of the sherds reveal the following types: Huasteca Black on White, Tancol Polychrome, Huasteca Heavy Plain, Tancol Brown on Buff, Zaquil Red, and molcajetes similar to Tancol V.* My tentative conclusions are that during period V small groups, carrying a Tancol cultural assemblage were moving northward along the coast. The function of these movements are as yet unde termined.

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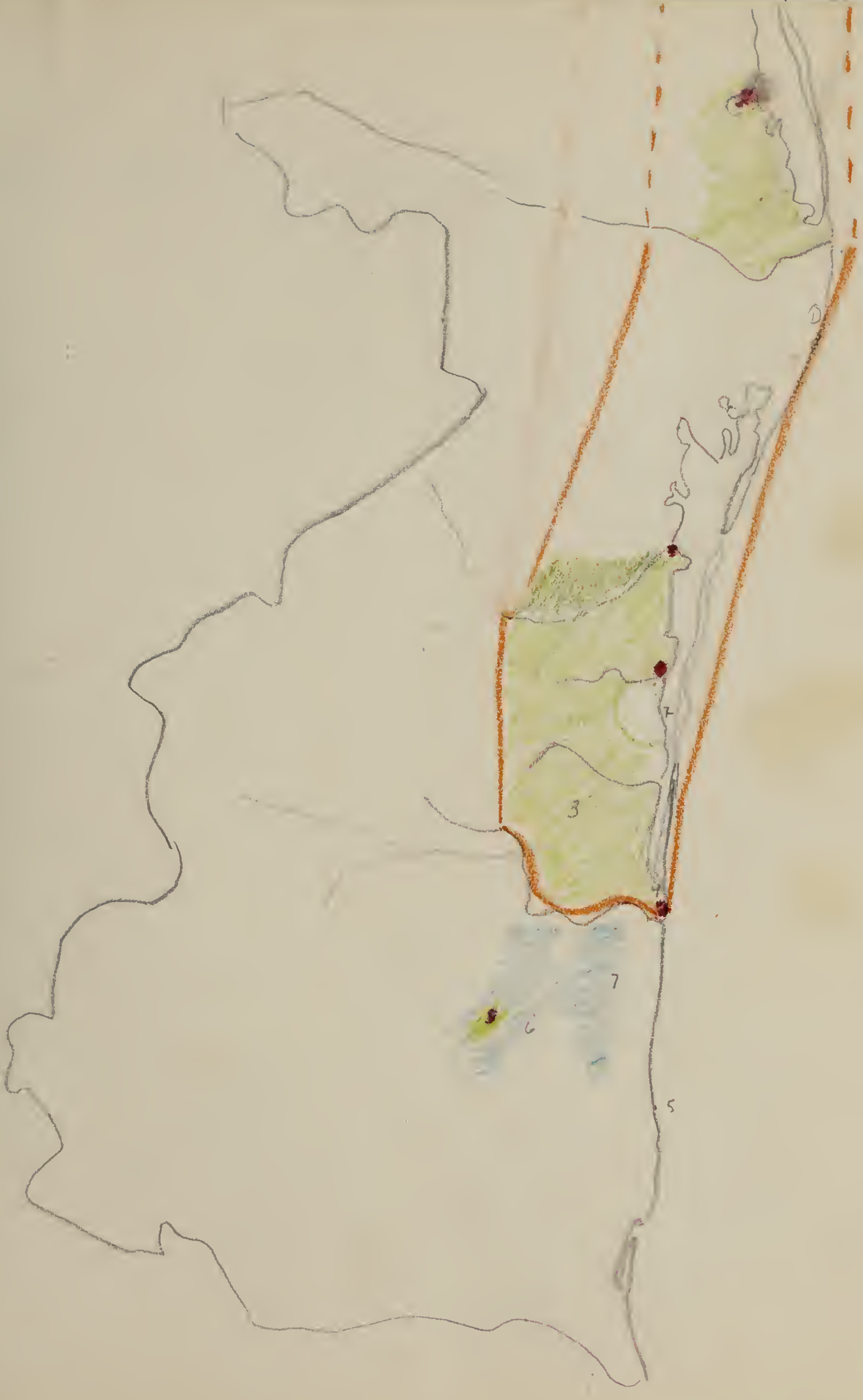
* Besides these sherds, there are two unidentifiable types: sherds with red on black designs, and sherds with finely engraved lines parelleling the neck.

The final group is represented by one ruin in the Sierra de Tamaulipas. The ruin is composed of twelve pyramids and about 200 round stone houses. A preliminary comparison of the sherds from this site, called Pueblito, with Huastecan sherds indicates that it is probably contemporaneous with Huasteca III. For the most part, however, the sherds are quite different from any other culture. A number of interesting similarities to the Alto focus materials of Texas were noted, however. From this region (the Sierrade Tamaulipas) I have received sherds of Tancol polychrome, as well as information concerning numerous other ruins in the area. In the near future, a survey of this area will be made. The solution of the problems concerning the relation of Pueblito to Tancol, and its similarities to the Alto focus should prove interesting, as should the identification of the other ruins of the region. At present, these sites represent the most northern settlements of the high cultures of Mexico.

In the coming month of March, I will survey the area from the Rio Grande to Santa Teresa (a town midway between the Rio Grande and the San Fernando); then, complete my explorations between Santa Teresa and the San Fernando River; and, finally, go to Loreto, and from there investigate the islands along the coast. This will complete the survey of coastal Tamaulipas north of the Rio Soto la Marina.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Besides these sherds, there are two unidentifiable types: sherds with red on black designs, and sherds with finely engraved lines parelleling the neck.

The final group is represented by one ruin in the Sierra de Tamaulipas. The ruin is composed of twelve pyramids and about 200 round stone houses. A preliminary comparison of the sherds from this site, called Pueblito, with Huastecan sherds indicates that it is probably contemporaneous with Huasteca III. For the most part, however, the sherds are quite different from any other culture. A number of interesting similarities to the Alto focus materials of Texas were noted, however. From this region (the Sierrade Tamaulipas) I have received sherds of Tancol polychrome, as well as information concerning numerous other ruins in the area. In the near future, a survey of this area will be made. The solution of the problems concerning the relation of Pueblito to Tancol, and its similarities to the Alto focus should prove interesting, as should the identification of the other ruins of the region. At present, these sites represent the most northern settlements of the high cultures of Mexico.

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